

DRAMA

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December MCMXXVIII

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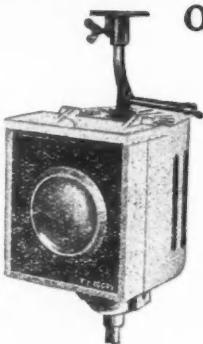
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DRAMA

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THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By J. T. Grein

IN a most interesting speech on "Ideals and Aims in the Theatre," broadcasted recently, Mr. Basil Dean made cogent reference to the present world dearth of plays. It is not my purpose here to discuss the inwardness or the effect of a state of affairs that seems strangely anomalous, in view of the ever-increasing number of authors who now regard the stage as a quick means to fame and financial prosperity. But it is undeniable that, of the outstanding plays produced in London during the last few weeks at least four have been revivals.

At Everyman "The Silver Box," presented under the supervision of the author himself, drew delighted audiences from all parts of the town. And what a vindication—if such were needed—of Mr. Galsworthy's leadership of the ranks of contemporary English dramatists this play is!

In "The Mollusc" at the Comedy, Miss Constance Collier has reinforced her position as a *comédienne* with the concrete of a fine performance, delicately shaded—a caricature as penetratingly amusing and pointed as the drawing of a master cartoonist.

On the side of comedy, too, there has been Sir Nigel Playfair's revival of "The Critic," at the Lyric, Hammersmith, a production that (now transferred to the Court Theatre) touched the high-water mark of accomplishment on the part of all concerned.

At "Q"—with a projected transfer to the Arts Theatre—Mr. Jack de Leon's

remarkable presentation of "John Gabriel Borkman," with Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Miss Nancy Price and Mr. Victor Lewisohn in the principal parts, has proved yet another rose of remembrance in this year of the Ibsen Centenary, aureoled with thorns of tragedy, budded with the power and distinction that only a real understanding of the master's work can give.

Turning now to the new plays, I find "The Lady from Alfaqueque" and "Fortunato" at the Court among those that have made the most lasting impression on my mind. The first is a skit, the main merit of which—to an English audience at any rate—lies in its casting and the brisk acting that results from Miss Gillian Scaife, Miss Ann Trevor, Miss Gracie Leigh, Mr. John Gielgud, Mr. Anthony Ireland and Mr. Geoffrey Wincott. For the play itself is marred by an endless coil of irrelevant dialogue that blurs what should have been the sharp outlines of its humour and entangles the many bits of neat and racial characterization which the brothers Quintero have achieved. Nevertheless, "The Lady from Alfaqueque" was well worth seeing, if only for the amusement of comparing Alfaqueque, as a paragon town, with our own Manchester or the American Boston.

"Fortunato," the second piece by the same authors, strikes a different note; one not without gentle irony, but sonorous with the voice of life and of humanity.

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

As a problem play that deals with conditions that can only be described as pathological rather than normal, "To What Red Hell" at Wyndham's, presents an anomaly in one scene that mars what, in spite of certain immaturities and crudities, would be otherwise a moving and arresting play. I refer to the crisis in which the uncle of the boy who has murdered a girl of the town during a period of mental oblivion, persuades the culprit to expiate his crime by suicide. Mr. Percy Robinson

is no mean technician and he is, moreover, animated by a sincere and passionate purpose. It says much for his skill as a dramatist, as well as for the remarkable acting of Mr. Frederick Peisley and Mr. Robert Horton that the first-night audience apparently failed to realize the inherent inconsistency that robbed the handling of the main theme—a plea against capital punishment—of most of its driving-force and cut the ground from the feet of conviction with one slip of the knife.

THE AMATEUR DRAMATIC YEAR BOOK

Reviewed by John Drinkwater

THIS book* reveals the astonishing fact that there are getting on for two thousand amateur dramatic societies in Great Britain. The great majority of these are affiliated to the British Drama League, under whose auspices the present volume is published. Mr. Bishop, the editor, is to be congratulated on an admirable piece of organization. His book is full of well arranged information and advice, and it may be said at once that even the smallest dramatic club cannot afford to hesitate a moment about laying out its 5s.

The book opens with a series of essays, among these being 'Hints on Rehearsing a Play' by Harley Granville-Barker, 'Village Drama' by Margaret Macnamara, and a very useful précis of theatrical law by H. F. Rubinstein, who is himself both a dramatist and a lawyer. There are also practical aids to scene-building, stage-

lighting, and make-up. In addition there are notes on the professional 'Little Theatres,' including a brief essay by Maurice Browne on his experiments in America. Added to these we have a comprehensive list of British amateur dramatic societies, with some information as to their personnel. I repeat that the secretary of each one of these will find the book a necessary part of his equipment. He will probably find also that many of his members will wish to possess their own copies.

The book as a whole is a remarkable testimony to the change that has been effected in the character of amateur acting during the past few years. It would perhaps be too much to say that the British Drama League is responsible for this, but Mr. Whitworth and his fellow workers can at least claim to have given the new movement the invaluable impetus of co-operation. Miss Macnamara, speaking of the bad old days, says, 'Up sprang charity theatricals, shamefaced and preoccupied by thoughts of gain. And down fell

* *The Amateur Dramatic Year Book*. Edited by G. W. Bishop. A. and C. Black. 5s. net.

THE AMATEUR DRAMATIC YEAR BOOK

a curse, taking shape in the "Humorous Sketch; price 6d; no fee." Such enterprises still flourish, but they flourish no longer without challenge. A few years ago they were the chief circumstance of amateur acting, but to-day they are of little or no significance beside the hundreds of societies that have been inspired by the new spirit that came into the English theatre in the early years of the century. It is in co-ordinating the work of these societies, in helping to direct their aims, in placing technical advice at their disposal, and in stimulating their efforts by annual competitions, that the British Drama League has done its most valuable work, and it is work that cannot be too warmly encouraged.

Everywhere up and down the land to-day we find these amateur companies, functioning usually on very slender resources, applying their brains and their enthusiasm to the service of fine drama. Nearly all the writers in the present volume stress the spiritual and artistic values of this germinating activity, and they do well to remind the London theatre that here in all sorts of remote corners is to be found a dramatic portent. What it holds in promise for the future can only be surmised, but it may not be too much to claim, as is boldly claimed by writers, that something like regeneration of the English theatre as a whole may come of it.

But I think that one word of warning is necessary. There is a tendency among all the contributors to the present volume, in their zeal for a splendid thing, to flatter the amateur at the expense of the professional player. Having been, in company with Barry Jackson and others who have since made the theatre a vocation, an amateur actor myself, with just such ideals as those that are here so lavishly and so rightly commended, I know how sweetly this kind of thing falls on the ear, and how

ready one is to be seduced by it. But it is well that everybody connected with this most significant movement should realize that seduction it is. There are a good many words in these pages, from people who speak with authority, suggesting to the amateur actor that he is a very fine fellow indeed, compact of natural graces that have not been impaired by the dull routine of professionalism. It is perfectly true that many professional players, by the circumstances of their calling, do in time lose something of that finer zest that makes acting, as all other work, vital. But it is not true to say that the technical knowledge that comes of long training, constant practice, and the discipline of having regularly to hold the attention of an audience that is not predisposed to favour, is in itself anything but desirable, or that without it acting can reach a high degree of merit. The proposal that is sometimes made, that is indeed made in this book, that there is a freshness and reality in the amateur's unguided instinct which is worth much more than the technical accomplishment of the professional is a very dangerous one. Genius apart, we may allow that the craft of acting is not a very difficult one to learn; but it most decidedly does need learning. Any normal boy or girl, who has no disabilities of mind or body, may with a little natural disposition be trained into sufficient competence as a player, but it will only darken counsel to encourage people in the belief that, whatever their talents may be, they can from the outset make a satisfactory entrance on to the stage by the light of nature. Mr. Granville-Barker seems to me once or twice in his contribution to this book to come near to indulging the heresy, but in other respects no amateur player can read what he has to say without realizing that the new movement can only fulfil its important destiny by a strict and ungrudging devotion.

THE REVIVAL OF THE RELIGIOUS PLAY

By Kenneth Ingram

THE revival of religious drama is a remarkable feature of a sector of English national life to-day. All over the country there is evidence of nativity plays, Bethlehem tableaux, and morality plays, springing more and more into existence. The evidence is remarkable when we remember that twenty years ago this kind of activity hardly existed. One or two churches in London were famous for such productions, but famous only because they were entirely unique. To-day such churches are exceptions no longer. It is hardly too much to say that in one out of every six big parishes in England, at least, there are some attempts of this sort made in the year. A further development of this revival is the introduction of the mystery play into our cathedrals. Canterbury has led the way, and the production of John Masefield's play is still fresh in our memory. Another play by another author is to be given in Liverpool Cathedral, and I understand that a third cathedral will shortly embark on a similar undertaking. The Canterbury production, last Whitsun, revealed the unlimited possibilities of the cathedral stage. It also proved that the pageant and spectacular effect is far more effective, under such conditions, than spoken dialogue—if only on account of acoustic difficulties.

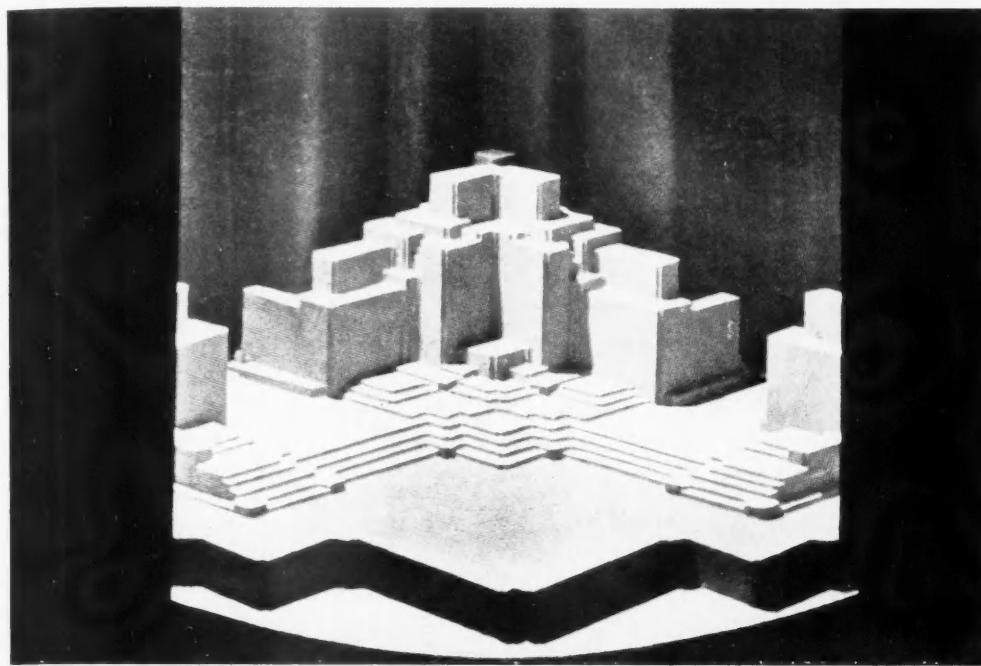
I suggest that this activity is widespread enough to constitute a movement, and a movement of a quite peculiar interest. I propose to say three things about it. (1) I shall attempt to trace its cause and what that cause involves; (2) I shall offer one or two practical criticisms and suggestions; (3) I shall try to show that whenever such productions are undertaken they meet with a quite extraordinary public response.

Of these three points the first requires much the most delicate treatment.

We have our own religious or philosophical views, and these views, in many cases, differ fundamentally. We have every right to them, and the last thing I desire to do is to introduce a controversial note. But I am bound to speak from my own standpoint. I happen to be associated a

good deal with what is called the Anglo-Catholic Movement, and therefore, perhaps, I am more inclined than I should be if I held other views, to notice that this revival of the religious drama in this country has coincided with the Anglo-Catholic Revival. Most of the attempts of this kind which have been made come, so far as I am personally aware, from parishes which bear a more or less Anglo-Catholic complexion. There seems, indeed, to be a close affinity between Catholicism, Roman or Anglican, and the stage, and this can no doubt be taken in a debating sense, as an argument against the reality of Catholicism. I do not share that conclusion, because I do not in the least believe that the drama is a medium for unreality and myth. The distinction between good or bad drama of any kind depends largely upon whether the play is essentially a medium of substantial reality and conviction. This is a proposition which has a very practical bearing on the subject of this paper, and I must therefore enlarge on this point a little more fully.

Given equal opportunity, the best results in any sort of religious play can only be obtained where the production is a genuine religious expression. You may simulate that expression by the most ornate artificial aids, but you will never quite get the same result. I confess that I have always felt this to be so even in the best professional religious productions I have seen. I do not mean to suggest that professional acting may not be a genuine expression of belief, but I do mean that, to my mind, the nativity or mystery play finds its truest setting on the amateur stage. It loses a certain vigour and virginity where it is heavily equipped with the professional element. I am not speaking of the modern play with a religious moral—I am confining myself throughout to the simple revival of the mystery play. I shall not speak of the modern drama with a religious tinge, because I confess I am sufficiently suspicious of it to regard it with some prejudice. There seems to be a fatal tendency for this kind of play to become sickly and senti-



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THE REVIVAL OF THE RELIGIOUS PLAY

mental, it degenerates too often into a journalese religiosity. So, of course, can the amateur mystery play, so far as the modern author is concerned. But I will deal with that danger under the second head.

The moral I am drawing throughout concerns the purely religious play of the simple "mystery" type. And the particular moral I am drawing now is, not that the performers should be confined to ecstatic religious enthusiasts—for such a characteristic, in its popular sense, simply means a want of mental balance which makes for bad art. It is not so much the individual as the general atmosphere. I submit that you will get the best results when you are expressing a general religious tradition, where the setting of the play is permeated so completely with that tradition that the expression can be perfectly natural and pure.

The really impressive effect of Ober-Ammergau is not so much the play as the setting of the play. It is significant that, although the atmosphere is seriously handicapped with foreign tourists, watching the scenes through opera-glasses and giving vent to the worst sort of American gush over the performers, though the village becomes hideous with agencies and box-offices, and noisy charabancs and excursion trains, nevertheless the genuine simplicity remains enormously impressive. But that is because the players believe in what they are playing. When I went to Ober-Ammergau what impressed me far more than the Passion Play itself, more even than the beautiful Bavarian mountains—that wonderful scenic background over which you see the shadows of noon and evening lengthen as the play proceeds—was the church at six in the morning before the play began. The tourist sightseers were still in their beds: they had not booked seats for that. I do not think anything I have ever seen will remain more vividly in my mind than that scene; the church filled with worshippers, at every altar of the church—there are some twenty altars in all—Masses being said, and, at the end of each Mass, another priest with another of the players as server, making his way through the dense kneeling crowds to begin the Liturgy and give Communion. I fancy that the most hardened sceptic would

have admitted that here was an extraordinary manifestation of religious conviction—I was never more conscious of it, though I have seen something of the same spontaneous devotion in Russia. You may differ as to the value you would put upon such devotion. But the moral which I am trying to draw remains clear. No one who went to church that morning could have failed to realize that the inspiration, the inner secret of the success of Ober-Ammergau, was to be found within those walls and before those altars. Without that the play could never have created its appeal.

I do not suggest that Catholicism is the only religion which will lend itself to the dramatic representation. There is no reason why other religions should not do so, though I do not remember actually hearing of plays inspired from other sources. I only wish to emphasize that the Christian tradition of the Nativity, and the Passion, the legends which have grown up round the story of the Saints, and even the more doctrinal features of Christianity, offer a field of inspiration for the drama, which, even yet, has hardly been explored. Stated at its very lowest, the Christian religion is immensely dramatic, it lends itself peculiarly to dramatic reproduction, as the mediæval Church very quickly discovered.

In a second article I shall touch very lightly upon a few practical suggestions as to productions of the kind.

LONDON CONFERENCE OF EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

This year the Drama League Meeting will have for its subject, "Shakespeare and the School." Dr. F. S. Boas will preside. All members of the League may take part in the Conference, which is held at University College, Gower Street, from December 1 to January 5. The Drama League Meeting is on Tuesday, January 1, at 5 p.m. Another conference item of dramatic interest is the play, "Exaltation," written by F. Schneider for and in collaboration with Eleanor Duse. This, the first production on any stage, will be given at the R.A.D.A. Theatre on Friday, January 4, at 5.15 p.m., by students of the Academy. This performance has been arranged in connection with the annual meeting of the Modern Languages Association.

THE GATE THEATRE STUDIO

An Interview with Mr. Peter Godfrey

THE Gate Theatre Studio is now in its fourth season. It dates from 1925, for in that year Peter Godfrey, its founder and producer, started giving very advanced plays on the upper floor of a warehouse near Covent Garden. The venture was successful; there was seldom much room to spare in the fascinating and just slightly uncomfortable theatre where the rats could be heard scuttling among the rafters overhead, and where the intimate surroundings gave to the acting a peculiar intensity.

Things have changed since then. The Gate is now firmly established in a larger and more convenient building in Villiers Street. To-day Mr. Godfrey's work is known both here and abroad. At a time when modern European drama is largely represented in this country by Ibsen and Strindberg, with an occasional play by Chekov as a tit-bit of modernity, he has given us Kaiser and Toller. After Simon Gantillon's "Maya" had created a sensation in Paris, it was done in London at the Gate. And the Gate has always recognized the importance of Eugene O'Neill.

But Mr. Godfrey has not satisfied himself with choosing modern plays alone. He has also insisted on modern methods of production, an aspect of his work which he emphasizes very strongly. It was, therefore, all the more interesting to hear him discuss drama in general, and his own plans in particular.

"I look upon the Gate Theatre," Mr. Godfrey exclaimed, "as a laboratory of ideas. We are experimental; we experiment with Expressionism, with Constructivism, with the combination of film and drama. We do not claim to have a monopoly of artistic truth; some of the ideas are good, some are not, and we discover which are which by a process of trial and error. Some of our experiments may seem extraordinary, but they are worth while because valuable results to the theatre may come out of them.

"The trouble is that the English theatre is lacking in enterprise. It is twenty-five years behind the times. So many dramatists, uninfluenced by con-

temporary movements abroad or in America, are still writing imitations of Shaw, of Galsworthy, of Henry Arthur Jones. Perhaps it is because such a play is easier than a novel—it is shorter and all you have to do is to take a play of Galsworthy's and copy the technique. It saves the trouble of discovering a technique for oneself, but does not help English drama.

"It is different in the States. There the theatre is much more alive; they are a pioneer country and anxious to do something new and not content with the old derivative stuff. We are going to do several American plays, but there are no suitable English ones which give us scope for experiment."

I asked Mr. Godfrey what he thought would be the most important development in the new theatre.

"Undoubtedly the combination of film with spoken drama," he replied. "The theatre makes use of all the arts—painting, music, architecture, and so on. It is going to make use of the cinema in the same way, and I see no reason why the film could not be used as often and as dramatically as painting, for example.

"We have used it in a play we produced here, making it into a commentary on the play. We hope to use it again when we do Toller's "Hoplá Wir Leben," a play which created rather a sensation in Berlin. Piscator, the German Communist producer, has combined film and drama on several occasions.

"But I am convinced that to use film as commentary is not enough. As a commentary it is only incidental to a play; it should be an essential part of it. I am not quite certain exactly how it should come in—that must be discovered by experiment. One possible way, for example, of using the film would be to make it express the subconscious. But come in it must, and that is where the experiments at the Gate are useful.

"We have had excellent support ever since we started in 1925, but there are still a large number of people in London who

THE GATE THEATRE STUDIO

think that we are highbrows. We are not. Highbrow is a horrid, frigid word and only too often denotes people who adopt supercilious poses. We are enthusiasts. And we want better acting, better plays. Acting is ceasing to be acting in England. Actors and actresses are ladies and gentlemen who continue to be ladies and gentlemen on the stage. There is no call on the imagination there. The theatre should never be merely drawing-room life; it is founded on a convention which is accepted by the imagination. We want the theatre as theatre, and plays written for players."

"What about the cult of the producer?" I asked.

"In the present-day commercial theatre it does harm. It is unfair to the actor, for one thing. Instead of thinking, and putting a hundred per cent. of himself into the part he is only putting fifty per cent., because he has been bullied and ordered about by a producer who has told him to do this and that and has changed half the lines in the play.

"But there is a cult of the producer which will be very important in the theatre of the future. It will be strangely like a return to a theatre I knew in the past.

"When I first started acting in Glasgow I played in a penny gaff. It was literally a penny gaff—one only paid a penny to go in.

"The plays worked something like this. A scenario was drawn up. Stage directions were hung up on the wings. 'Enter Miss X and Mr. Y. They quarrel for five minutes. Enter Mr. Z. He conveys to the audience that he is the son of Miss X.' And so on. All the dialogue was gagged from beginning to end.

"Well, the play of the future will be something like that, though not quite so extreme. The chief person will be the producer. Let us call him rather the director to distinguish him from the producer of to-day. The director gets an idea for a play, works out the idea, and then tells the artist to design such and such a scene, and the author to write such and such a piece of dialogue. All co-operate in this way and gradually a composite work of art will come into being. That, I think, is the direction in which the theatre is going to develop."

A. T. K. GRANT.

THE PUBLIC AND THE THEATRE

LEUT.-COLONEL C. HEADLAM, M.P. for Barnard Castle, addressed a preliminary public meeting at Sheffield in connexion with the Annual Conference of the British Drama League. He spoke on "The Public and the Theatre."

The same influences were at work to-day, he said, as one saw in the late 'nineties— influences which caused critics to say that something was wrong with the drama. This criticism was generally founded upon one fact alone—that plays produced in London as often as not were bad plays, and that they failed.

"That criterion for estimating the value of the drama may possibly have been a true one in the days of Queen Elizabeth, or possibly in the days of Queen Anne, or possibly only a hundred years ago. But all over England at the present time there are critical and intelligent audiences who are just as capable of forming an opinion upon what is a good play as are London audiences.

"If by our continual endeavour on the amateur and semi-professional stage we can succeed in improving public taste, and gradually extend the number of people who are interested in the drama, we shall be able, without the assistance of any Government, and without the financial aid of some dramatically-inclined millionaire, to guide public opinion until it demands that we shall have a National Theatre and that general patronage of the drama which is really essential if it is to be a complete success."

Sir Henry Hadow, Vice-Chancellor of Sheffield University, who presided, said that fifty years ago plays with ideas in them were extraordinarily few and far between. As our plays grew better, so our audiences grew more intelligent, demanding better plays and getting them.

Mr. Rowlands, the Director of the Swinton Players, desires it to be known that productions by these players are done not with but *without* box sets, as stated in last month's DRAMA. These players consider that "box sets" have no place in small stage technique.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF

THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

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Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

THE Autumn Conference of the British Drama League, held this year at Sheffield, passed off with much *éclat*, thanks, in large measure, to the admirable preliminary organization undertaken by Miss Radford and the Committee of the Sheffield Playgoers, under whose auspices the Conference was held. Each year the Autumn Conference leaves us with a sense of debt to those who render such valuable assistance in the towns visited, and in this connexion we must not omit to mention the kindness of those hosts and hostesses who rendered the visit of so many of our delegates less like an expedition to an unknown city than to a house of friends. We are also very grateful to the Lord Mayor of Sheffield, who again maintained the tradition set by other cities in offering

the Conference an official welcome at the Town Hall. Alderman Humberston's public affirmation of his belief in the municipal theatre idea was voted by many delegates as one of the most courageous statements that we have heard from any Lord Mayor who has yet addressed us.

In another column we give a brief extract from Colonel Headlam's speech at the public meeting. Any detailed reference to the Conference of Affiliated Societies must be held over till our next number. In the meanwhile the Minutes are printed in this issue and are being carefully considered by the Council of the League. This much, however, may be safely said. No one connected with the League can but welcome the desire manifested by many speakers at the Conference that the League's work should be brought into still closer touch with its members by an adequate representation on the Council of those who already represent it in districts far removed from the metropolis. For good or for evil the Drama League was founded from London and its present position is largely the result of the powerful support it has always found from the leaders of the London professional theatre, as well as from the leaders of various social movements whose headquarters are situated in London. If a due balance, however, is to be maintained, it is all the more necessary that the provinces should assume their rightful place in the Councils of the League.

At the conclusion of the Conference it was pleasant to be reminded that the main object of the League is not, after all, organization for its own sake, but the actual production of plays on the stage and before an audience. The Sheffield Playgoers produced for our edification an original play by Miss Ruth Dodds—"The Pressed Man." Delegates were greatly impressed by the excellent staging and by the finished acting which, as the authoress herself emphasized in her closing speech, did full justice to her play.

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by Norman Marshall

"Volpone," Freely adapted by Stefan Zweig. Allen & Unwin. 6s.

"The Queen's Husband." By Robert Sherwood. Scribners. 2s. 6d.

"Peter Pan." By J. M. Barrie. Hodder & Stoughton. 5s.

"Second Plays." By the Earl of Lathom. Secker. 7s. 6d.

"The Rag." By Allan Monkhouse. Sidgwick & Jackson. 3s. 6d.

Last month brought for review a boldly renovated version of "Every Man in His Humour," and now this month brings a far more audacious version of another of Jonson's plays, "freely adapted" by Stephen Zweig and translated back again from the German by Ruth Langner. The adaptor has begun by pruning and compressing, cutting out the sub-plot in its entirety, abolishing several of the characters, and reducing the number of the scenes from eighteen to six; but he has not been content with mere mechanical alterations; he has altered the whole tone of the play. Jonson's "Volpone" is frankly and avowedly "a play with a purpose," a cautionary tale. In the end virtue triumphs over vice and a number of eminently sound moral maxims are heavily stressed. But this "free adaptation" is coldly and ironically cynical throughout, and in the end wit and roguery are left triumphant. The whole meaning and purpose of the original is turned upside down. The satire is developed with a pitiless remorselessness which will make the play seem savage and repulsive to many tastes, but there is no denying the brilliance with which the adaptor has composed his variations on the original theme. It is a fascinating, queerly original piece of work, "to be played as a commedia dell'arte, lightly, quickly, caricatured rather than realistic; allegro con brio."

"The Queen's Husband" is another play in which the bite and tang of the satire will not be to everybody's taste, though the author has thoughtfully provided a slab of sugary romance "to take away the taste." This seems to me in every way a much better play than "The Road to Rome." It has all the humour and theatrical effectiveness of the earlier play, but this time the author has resisted the temptation to pounce greedily upon every slick and easy chance for an effect. It is a difficult play to review, as the author in his preface, has forestalled every possible criticism, and has laid about him so vigorously that he has lamed his critics in advance. Preface and play combine to make as lively and entertaining a book as I have read for some time.

I thought I could rely on "Peter Pan" to provide a complete contrast to the satire and irony of these two plays, but in the printed version

"Peter Pan" too becomes unexpectedly and delicately ironical from beginning to end. The author confesses that he has no recollection of having written the play, so presumably the running commentary and discursive stage directions of the reading version were written comparatively recently, and in a rather different mood from that in which the play was originally conceived. Personally I liked reading the play very much more than any of the performances I have seen, and I recommend the book to everybody who finds the sentimentalism of the average Christmas production of the play a little too cloying to be digestible.

With Lord Lathom's book the spate of irony, cynicism and satire begins to abate. Two of the plays, "Fear" and "Twenty Houses in a Row" have already been seen in London. The third, "Ostriches," is a curious combination of very modern wit and urbanity combined with a large amount of the highly illogical and unnecessary heroics and self-sacrificings of Victorian melodrama. For some reason even more mysterious than usual the play has been banned by the Censor. Much more entertaining than any of the plays in the book is the vigorous and refreshingly frank preface.

In "The Rag" Mr. Monkhouse spends two acts skilfully and ingeniously building up a situation out of nothing in particular. These two acts give one something of the same feeling as watching somebody build up a castle of cards. But having built up his situation Mr. Monkhouse apparently found it was almost as useless to him as a castle of cards, and transferred the whole interest of the play to a character whom he had unfortunately omitted to characterise in any detail during the earlier acts. The result is that since we are quite uninterested in the character or what happens to him the last act loses point. The ending of the play seems all the more pallid in contrast to the earlier acts which recreate the atmosphere of a newspaper office far more vividly than I can remember it ever having been done before, whether in a play or a novel.

At Stockton, on October 8, a dramatic recital was given by Miss Ivy Smithson and Mr. Harold Hill. In spite of numerous counter-attractions in the town there was a large audience. Miss Smithson commenced her work with some child studies, which easily won favour with the audience. The first group of modern verse contained, among other things, "Nicholas Nye" (Walter De La Mare), "The Crowning of Dreaming John" (Drinkwater), and "Tarantella" (Hilaire Belloc), each being given with point and charm. Flecker's "The Dying Patriot" was spoken with singular art. The moods of the varied items were met in happy manner.

THE PLAY IN THE SCHOOL

III.—THE PRODUCER AT WORK

By Maude Scott

WHEN I see the curtain fall on the last performance of each of our weekly productions at the St. Pancras People's Theatre, no matter how great the applause, I always feel that only then am I really ready to start producing that particular play. I cannot, in face of the ever-increasing audiences at our theatre, affect humility and say that the plays are not successful—I must, indeed, claim a real success for them—but in the innermost recesses of my mind I am not quite satisfied with myself. I have often sought for signs of this self-dissatisfaction among other producers, but I must admit I do not often find them. Without in any way claiming any superiority, I have come to the conclusion that not very many people ever realize how much there is to look for in a good play—(except, of course, the author !)

"But what does it matter, if the audience is satisfied?" someone may ask, "if your theatre is filled to overflowing all the time?" Well, all I can say is that no workman who is satisfied with anything short of the best of which he is capable can find any *pleasure* in his work, and when the work of production is one's whole life (as with the professional), or his recreation (as with the amateur), it seems to me it would be impossible to continue doing it if there were no pleasure in it.

I always tell my students that the preparation of a play should be a *voyage of discovery*, inspired by emotion, guided by knowledge and restrained by reason, and I always envy those producers who have to prepare only three or four plays a year, and think what an immense pleasure they must get out of the preparation of those plays. They can indulge in regular explorations, and as most school plays will be produced in these conditions, the school-producer should regard himself as working under peculiar advantages. When one has to do thirty plays in a year one doesn't get much time for the *pleasures* of preparation, and the *voyage of discovery* is apt to become a Cook's excursion. But when I go to see one of

these plays which have had so much valuable time for preparation, I sometimes find that the producer has somehow missed even more of the sideshows in his explorations than I miss myself in my hurried excursions. I have pondered deeply on the reasons for this, and I have come to the conclusion that there is a very general lack of appreciation of the value of words, and consequently of preparation of the actual text of the play.

Producers in general do not, I think, realize the immense value of a good knowledge of the grammatical construction of language. I don't think I personally ever realized the value of simple grammar till I tried to correct wrong inflexions and emphases.

I imagine that it is precisely on this point that authors quarrel most with their producers, and surely justly so. The text of the play *is* the play. If a play is worth production it must carry within itself the whole source of information about itself, and a producer can only *know* his play by really knowing the text of the play. Any outside help he may need in its production can, after all, only illustrate and illuminate the text.

It perhaps sounds trite to say that a producer should *know* a play before he produces it, but it is a strange fact that it is possible to produce a play acceptably to the average audience without the producer really knowing the play. To know a play one must have a very keen observation, a true understanding and appreciation of the value of individual words and phrases, and above all, a capacity for concentrated study. It is not, of course, the special points, the achievement of big situations, or even effective characterization, that will be missed. The indication of these things is generally so obvious in the text that they cannot be missed. But how many producers ever realize, even in their own minds, that in any well-written play, every word has a meaning, every phrase a point, and every sentence a climax? And if he does realize the fact, how many, in actual

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practice, give sufficient study to the text before starting rehearsals to be able to guide the actors in the study of the words of their parts, or even listen with sufficient concentration at rehearsals to notice when a large number of words and sentences which have no striking significance are delivered in such a way that they fail to have any significance whatever? It is perhaps for this reason that so often plays like those of Mr. Milne, which depend mainly upon the actual words of the text, seem so

ineffectual in the hands of amateurs.

The realization of the value of every word of the text of a play will not, however, succeed by itself in "getting a play over." It is in this "getting over" of the play to the audience that the art of the producer lies, and again I think it is too seldom realized of what immense value a real knowledge of the technique of the art of speech is in bringing out the most subtle and intricate values of a play as well as its more obvious ones.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE FESTIVAL THEATRE.

SIR,—I note that in your last issue Mr. Basil Dean makes use of an appreciation of Mr. Ridge's book on Stage Lighting, in order to make an attack on the Festival Theatre. Mr. Basil Dean is very welcome to attack the Festival Theatre—even under cover of a book-review—but his attack would be more welcome if any of his statements bore any recognizable relation to fact.

In the first place Mr. Basil Dean has not been inside the Festival Theatre since it has been open to the public so his description of our activities as exclusively experiments in methods of presentation or new schemes of stage lighting is based on nothing worth arguing about.

The remainder of Mr. Basil Dean's case is based on the curious assumption twice specifically expressed, that the Festival Theatre is subsidized and divorced from the every-day cares of existence by reason of private munificence. This is not a mere distortion of fact; it simply has not a grain of truth in it anywhere. The Festival Theatre continues to exist because it is managed in such a way that the people of Cambridge find it worth their while to spend something over £500 within its doors every week, and if they did not it would cease to exist in a few weeks. Financially it differs from Mr. Basil Dean's own theatrical activities only in that the receipts go back into the enterprise instead of into some financier's pocket, and in the fact that those who find it worth while to finance it do so only in order to see plays that are works of art produced with the money they have provided. This being so, that part of Mr. Basil Dean's attack falls down in its present form.

May I cordially invite Mr. Basil Dean to visit the Festival Theatre? May I also cordially invite him to write a carefully considered attack on us? If DRAMA should not happen to be sufficiently interested to publish it, we ourselves shall be proud to do so in the Festival Theatre Review.

Yours faithfully.

TERENCE GRAY,
Director, Festival Theatre, Cambridge.

ALTRUISM IN THE THEATRE.

SIR,—The British Drama League Festival of Community Drama has been criticized because the Drama League has organized it, during its life of four years, on a competitive basis. Why, I continue to be asked, is it competitive, when (we are rightly told) Art is co-operative in its nature, and competition is its enemy? Why does a body of wise, artistic and experienced people resort to a system whereby one team sets out to oust another?

It seems that we may as well ask why we do not yet have a faultless League of Nations, or why the Kingdom of God is so long in coming. The arrangements are made, but human nature is still being refined. If we are disgusted with the little insincerities and the colossal humbug of life, does it mean that we are to cast aside the societies that necessarily has forced us to build up—just because we are not yet able to get the best results from them?

Competition is still necessary in the Drama Festival because players and audience alike still require its stimulus. The element of competition will be distilled out of the movement when players and audience are fired only by altruism and artistic enthusiasm. Then expert criticism will take the place of expert adjudication.

Meantime how are we to advance the *motif* of the Festival towards that end? Is it by the most artistic players "sticking out" with their anti-competitive scruples, or "sticking in" with their ultra-altruistic influence?

Each playing society has to decide that question for itself. While it is true that the great reformers in history did what they did by "sticking out," they all had a practical alternative to offer, and engaged in it. Abstention from co-operation might be as great a fault at the Festival as tolerating, meantime, the "ousting" fever—which, by the way, is by no means so rampant within the movement as one might expect.

Yours faithfully,

HALBERT TATLOCK,
Glasgow.

SHEFFIELD CONFERENCE MINUTES

The Ninth Annual Conference of the British Drama League was held on Saturday, November 3, 1928, at the Y.M.C.A., Sheffield. Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth, in the chair, and ninety-six delegates and members were present.

MORNING SESSION.

1. *The Minutes of the last Conference*, which had been circulated in DRAMA, were taken as read and signed.

Arising out of Minutes.

Mr. Ahier (Huddersfield Thespians) asked for some explanation as to why the resolution passed at the last Conference in regard to the publication of the names and addresses of Secretaries of affiliated societies had not been carried out.

Mr. Whitworth replied that shortly after the Conference he was approached by Messrs. A. and C. Black, who proposed to issue an Amateur Dramatic Year Book containing many interesting articles and also a list of all the dramatic societies in the country. It was thought by the Council of the League that this publication fully met the purpose of the resolution, and it was therefore decided to co-operate with Messrs. A. and C. Black, and he hoped that members would think that the price asked, 5s., was not too much for the value received.

Message of Condolence to Mrs. W. L. Courtney.

Mr. Whitworth, as Chairman of the Conference, stated that he wished to move a resolution registering the sympathy of the Conference with Mrs. Courtney on the death of her husband, Mr. W. L. Courtney, who had been a member of the Council for many years and who had given much valuable help to the League. It was proposed by Mr. Whitworth, and seconded by Miss Elsie Fogerty, and unanimously resolved:—

That a message of condolence should be sent from the Conference to Mrs. Courtney on the death of her husband.

2 (a) *The following resolution was moved by Mr. Ahier (Huddersfield Thespians), and seconded by Mr. Slater (Stockport Garrick Society):*

That this Conference is of the opinion that the payment of an additional guinea to the B.D.L. for the purpose of collecting fees and guaranteeing returns under the proposed Panel Scheme is unnecessary and that the procedure adopted by many agents and authors, namely, that of accepting the returns sent by the Treasurer of the Society and signed by a fully-qualified accountant would meet the case.

Mr. Ahier, in moving his resolution, stated that his Society were of the opinion that the employment of a special officer to collect the royalties on behalf of dramatists was unnecessary. His Society had always forwarded to the author or his agent a statement of their receipts which had been countersigned by an accountant. This had always been accepted and he saw no reason for the payment of an extra guinea for the purpose of collecting and guaranteeing fees.

Mr. Slater (Stockport Garrick Society) stated that his Society had also had no trouble, the fee due being forwarded to the dramatist immediately after the production without even an accountant's certificate.

Mr. Whitworth stated that the employment of an agent was incorporated in the scheme in order to attract dramatists and to give them a sense of

security. In this connexion a letter was read from Dr. L. du Garde Peach, who had been the inventor of the scheme, stating that he regarded it as an integral part of the scheme.

Mr. Whitworth then stated that he thought the time had come when the Conference should be made aware of what had actually been done in regard to the scheme under discussion. In October last the scheme had been circularized to about one hundred dramatists. He had received twenty replies, some of which were read. Of these Mr. Brighouse, Mr. A. A. Milne, Mr. Allan Monkhouse, Sir Arthur Pinero, Mr. H. M. Harwood were opposed to the scheme, while Mr. Arnold Bennett, Mr. Lennox Robinson, Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, Mr. Knoblock, Mr. Laurence Binyon, Mr. Miles Malleson, Miss Gwen John, Miss Margaret Macnara and Mr. Terence Gray approved of the scheme subject to certain conditions. In view of the conditional agreement even of many of those who favoured the scheme, Mr. Whitworth doubted if sufficient unanimity could be achieved as to make the scheme workable.

Mr. Hirst pointed out that he noted that no stress was made on the services of an official collector by the authors in their letters. He thought that Mr. A. A. Milne's idea of a five-guinea deposit was good, and should be embodied in the scheme.

Mr. Purdon thought that if the scheme was to be carried out at all, it should be carried out in its entirety and that the fee of one guinea for "contracting in" with the scheme was not too much.

Mr. Gregson (Leeds Civic Playhouse) supported the resolution.

Miss Maud (Old Scholars' Dramatic Society, Whitcliffe Mount School) stated that dramatists had not questioned the fees paid by her Society and that she considered no auditor was needed.

The resolution, on being put to the vote, was carried.

2 (b) *The following resolution was moved by Mr. Gregson (Leeds Civic Playhouse), and seconded by Mr. Ahier (Huddersfield Thespians):*

That the B.D.L. compile a White List of all Authors who are prepared to grant percentage terms to affiliated Dramatic Societies with a recommendation that the plays of these Authors be performed in preference to the plays of authors who are not prepared to grant these terms.

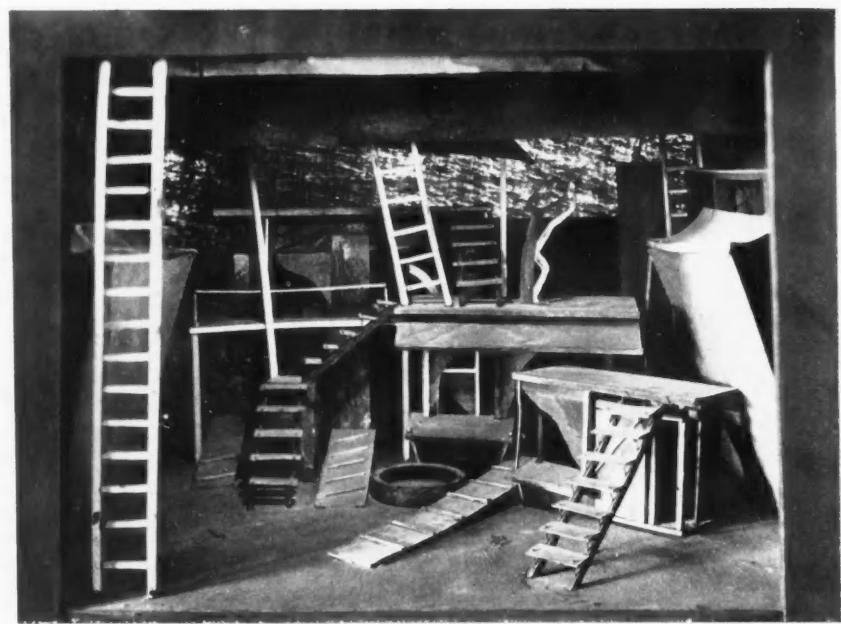
Mr. Ahier, in seconding the resolution, stated that in the July number of DRAMA, 1924, a list of dramatists was published who agreed to the scheme drawn up by the League in that year. Since then some on the list had changed their minds, and others who were not in that list had now consented to accept royalties. He was very anxious that a new list should be drawn up, and that it should be published in DRAMA.

Mr. Crowther (Huddersfield Thespians) stated that the only way to influence authors was to diminish their incomes, and if societies would agree only to perform plays by authors on the White List, in two years time he thought that Messrs. French and the dramatists on the Black List would find their incomes greatly diminished.

Mr. Sladen Smith (Un-named Society) stated that all his plays, with the exception of one, which was controlled by French, could be played on the percentage basis. He was bound to confess, however,



SCENE FROM RAMPA, THE PLAY FROM
THE GERMAN OF MAX MÖHR, AS RE-
CENTLY PRODUCED AT THE GATE
THEATRE STUDIO (*see Page 38*).



A SCENE FROM "THE WITCH," EXHIBITED BY THE GUILD OF RUSSIAN STAGE ARCHITECTS AT THE RECENT EUROPA HOUSE EXHIBITION IN BERLIN

SHEFFIELD CONFERENCE MINUTES

that he received more money out of the one play which was in French's hands than out of the others, the reason, he thought, being French's excellent publicity service. He urged the Conference to agree to the publication of a White List, to be published as often as possible and to be made as widely known as possible.

Mr. Rowlands (Swinton Players) stated that he would like this list to become a permanent feature of DRAMA.

Mrs. Storr Best (Sheffield Playgoers) enquired if the Drama League would supplement the list with a strong recommendation to societies that other plays should be boycotted.

Mr. Benson (Medway Theatre Club) proposed an amendment:

That the British Drama League should provide a White List of all authors who were prepared to grant percentage terms to affiliated societies of not more than seven per cent. for six performances and ten per cent. for three performances, with a condition of membership of the Drama League, that the plays of those authors only be performed.

The amendment was seconded by Mr. Hirst.

Mr. Gillett (King's Lynn Players) opposed the amendment.

Mr. Slater (Stockport Garrick Society) supported the amendment.

Mr. Holford Knight put in a plea for moderation, and pointed out that for the League to recommend its societies to act plays by some dramatists to the exclusion of others was to stultify its whole object as a body which was out to push the best drama.

The amendment, on being put to the vote, was lost.

Mr. Wood stated that he would suggest the second half of the resolution should be deleted, as he thought it would be inadvisable to adopt any policy which might alienate dramatists, and proposed the following amendment:

That the B.D.L. should compile regularly a list of authors who are prepared to grant percentage terms to affiliated dramatic societies.

This amendment was seconded by Miss Radford, and carried unanimously. It was decided that a paragraph in regard to this matter should be published every month in DRAMA.

The Chairman reported that the special subcommittee set up to deal with the authors' fees scheme had not yet met to consider the replies. It was decided to consult this committee as soon as possible, and to publish a statement in DRAMA.

2 (c) *The following resolution was on the agenda to be moved by the Huddersfield Thespians:*

That the Constitution of the B.D.L. should be altered so as to make it upon a democratic basis: (1) To further this end, Great Britain should be divided into geographical areas, and each area should send one member to Council; (2) That the newly-formed Council be elected by popular vote at the Annual Conference; (3) That the present members of the Council retain office during their lifetime or until they resign.

Mr. Ahier stated that when framing this resolution he was not aware of the rules of the League, but after seeing these rules he wished to withdraw his resolution.

Mr. Whitworth stated that he would have welcomed a debate on the resolution as he had, for some time, been considering the question of pro-

vincial representation on the Council of the League, and he had wished to suggest that the Council should be enlarged to thirty members, to include six representatives from six provincial areas—possibly those into which the country was at present divided for the purposes of the National Festival. He would like, therefore, to move from the Chair.

That this Conference desires the Council of the League to consider whether it would be possible to secure geographical representation on the Council up to a limit of six areas, each area to nominate one member who should sit on the Council for one year, in addition to the present members of the Council.

The resolution was seconded by Mr. Cyril Wood. It was pointed out that this Conference had no power to alter the constitution of the League, and that any such proposal would have to come up before the Annual General Meeting.

A question was asked as to the non-attendance of certain members of the Council. Mr. Whitworth explained that any members of the Council who did not attend during the year was automatically excluded from the Council, but was eligible for re-election. This process was in operation. Certain members of the Council had, however, been re-elected from time to time in consequence of their great value to the League outside the actual deliberations of the Council.

Mr. Dawes (Castleford Secondary School) stated that he was in favour of the resolution, and he suggested a system of postal ballot for electing provincial members. He thought that Wales should have a representative. Mr. Twilley (Leicester Drama Society) asked if Mr. Whitworth had considered the possible development of district representation, and if it would be likely to lead to decentralisation of control.

The Chairman stated that decentralisation was, in his opinion, a separate one from the question of representation on the Council.

The resolution, on being put to the vote, was carried with one dissentient.

AFTERNOON SESSION.

3. *The following resolution was moved by Mr. Alfred Wareing:*

That the British Drama League be asked to pledge its support of an effort to establish permanently a professional company touring the provinces and presenting outstanding modern plays.

Mr. Wareing, in moving his resolution, stated that he emphatically believed in the renaissance of the English theatre, which was coming, not through London, but through the provinces, where an important part would be played by the British Drama League. That part was chiefly in the organisation of the audiences, and he hoped that the support of the Drama League would be forthcoming to assist the establishment of such a touring company as was in view.

The resolution was seconded by Mr. Boughton Chatwin, who stated that a good deal of support would be forthcoming if the help of amateurs could be invoked by way of employing them as supers.

Mr. Wood stated that he would welcome a rather more detailed scheme, but in the meantime he wished to support this resolution, as he considered it would help the amateurs to rid themselves of the criticism which is so often levelled against them

SHEFFIELD CONFERENCE MINUTES

that they took no part in supporting the professional theatre. If this resolution could be carried, he felt that it would result in a harmonious co-operation between the amateur and the professional. Miss Fogerty suggested that the Drama League should organise a drama week in each large town which should coincide with the coming of the proposed company. Mr. Crowther (Huddersfield Thespians) stated that he concluded a company somewhat after the lines of The Arts League of Service was contemplated. Mr. Doran (Manchester Playgoers) stated that he thought there was nobody who would disagree with the resolution, but what was wanted was a practical suggestion for carrying it into effect. Mr. Hannan Clark (Gloucester Societies) enquired whether the support desired was financial or moral. Mr. Wareing replied that the support he asked for was mainly moral, and only financial in the sense of payment for theatre tickets.

Mr. Purdom enquired why support was requested for one particular company rather than for another. Lady Iris Capell asked if the League had any power to enforce the support of its societies. Mr. Whitworth replied that only a recommendation was possible. Mr. Purdom stated that he considered that the League should give its support to the repertory theatres already in existence. Mr. Benson stated that he presumed the company was not yet in existence, and before pledging the support of his Society he would like to have further particulars, as such support would entail a certain amount of work and expense in circularising, etc.

Mr. Wareing replied that there was at present no company in existence, but he saw no reason why three or four should not be formed in the future. He was anxious, however, that at least one company should be formed under the aegis of the B.D.L. The resolution, on being put to the vote, was carried with the following proviso, which was proposed by Mr. Doran and seconded by Mr. Gregson:

That a sub-committee should be appointed by the Council of the League to examine Mr. Wareing's scheme before it is put into operation. The following motion was proposed by Miss Radford, and seconded by Mr. Ahier:

That the Rules of the British Drama League National Festival of Community Drama be discussed in open Conference, with special reference to Rules 20 and 22.

In dealing with Rule 20, "The judges for the preliminary performances will be appointed by the Area Committees," Miss Radford stated that the Sheffield Playgoers' Society were of the opinion that the preliminary judges should be appointed by the League. Mr. Whitworth pointed out that if desired the League was ready to nominate such judges, and in Scotland in 1927 the judge for the preliminary heats had been Mr. Martin Browne, who had been appointed at the suggestion of the League. Mr. Doran proposed that the rule should be left as it stood. Mr. Hannan Clark supported Mr. Doran.

A question was asked whether the Central Festival Committee could afford to pay a preliminary judge or judges. Mr. Purdom (Hon. Treasurer for the Festival Committee) replied in the negative.

The motion, on being put to the vote, was lost.

With reference to Rule 22, "By a 'new author' is meant one whose work has hitherto been per-

formed by no other organisation than that entering the play for the Festival." Miss Radford gave instances of authors being thus rendered ineligible who clearly had a fair claim to compete for the prize for a play by a new author. Mr. Boughton Chatwin supported Miss Radford.

An amendment was proposed by Mr. Hannan Clark, seconded by Mr. Wood, as follows:

That the Central Festival Committee be asked to reconsider this rule in the light of such concrete disadvantages as had been cited.

The amendment was carried unanimously.

Election of Central Festival Committee.

The Chairman reported that the three members at present elected by the Conference to serve on the Committee were Mr. Purdom, Mr. Doran and Mr. Ivor Brown. A letter was read from Mr. Ivor Brown, asking the Conference to accept his resignation owing to lack of time. It was proposed by Mr. Adams, seconded by Mr. Levey, and

Resolved: "That Mr. Purdom should be re-elected." Proposed by Mr. Ahier, seconded by Mr. Wood, and *Resolved:* "That Mr. Doran should be re-elected." Proposed by Mr. Ahier, and

Resolved: "That Mr. J. R. Gregson should be asked to serve in place of Mr. Ivor Brown."

Mr. Boughton Chatwin pointed out the difficulty sometimes experienced by Area Committees in sending their Secretary in person to meetings of the Central Festival Committee. He therefore proposed, and Mr. Rowlands (Swinton Players) seconded, and it was

Resolved: "That the meetings of the Central Festival Committee could be attended either by the Secretary or by a representative of the Area Committees."

Date of Next Conference.

Mr. Whitworth reported that two invitations had been received last year for the Autumn Conference in 1929, one from Hull and the other from Welwyn Garden City. The Welwyn invitation has since been withdrawn. Another invitation has just arrived from the Northampton Repertory Company to hold the Conference there.

Miss Pakington suggested that while they were very grateful for the invitation from Hull, it might be advisable to accept the invitation from Northampton, as a Conference had not been held in the Midlands for some considerable time.

Mr. Purdon proposed, and it was unanimously *Resolved:* "That the invitation of the Northampton Repertory Theatre should be accepted."

It was decided that the invitation from Hull, if renewed, should be accepted on the first opportunity.

Other Business.

Mr. Thomson (Liverpool Playgoers Club) stated that he wished to draw the attention of the League to the prize given for the best play by a new author performed for the Festival. The prize took the form of publication, but the terms of publication were such that no financial remuneration was forthcoming for the author from the first 500 copies sold.

The Chairman pointed out that it was a question rather of recognition for merit than of material reward.

After some discussion, it was decided to ask the Central Committee to go into the matter.

Mr. Gregson enquired as to the constitution of the League and as to the powers of the Con-

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ference in the government of the League. Mr. Whitworth replied that the Conference had no status in the constitution of the League, which, while on a thoroughly democratic basis, had been drawn up before the Conference had been instituted. He explained that only at a General Meeting of the League could a resolution affecting the constitution of the League or its Council be operative. In order to clear up any misunderstanding, at Mr. Wood's request Mr. Whitworth agreed to publish in the DRAMA a short statement as to this matter.

Mr. Doran asked that before the next Annual General Meeting a list should be published showing the number of attendances of members of the Council.

Lady Iris Capell proposed, and Mrs. Rogers seconded the following motion:

That this Conference is satisfied with its present position as an advisory body, and for the discussion of those matters which are too small to be brought up to a General Meeting.

This motion, on being put to the vote, was lost.

Mr. Rowlands (Swinton Players) brought forward a recommendation, which was supported by Mr. Wallace (People's Theatre, Newcastle), that the Conference should form part of the General Meeting.

This recommendation was carried, after Mr. Dawes, in speaking, had moved a vote of thanks to the Chairman.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

DRAMA SCHOOL AT WELLS

By the time 1928 closes many schools of drama will have been held, but none will have had a more perfect setting than that organized during August at Wells by the Village Drama Society and the Somerset Rural Community Council. Our main achievement was the production of "The Winter's Tale," in which practically every student took part. The Grecian dresses were designed and made on the spot from home-dyed, hand-stencilled material, and were pronounced extremely effective when two public performances of the play were given at the Town Hall on our last day. No one who took part will ever forget the mixture of patience, alertness, and humour with which Mrs. Gibson conducted the rehearsals of a difficult play, nor all the practical help she gave us throughout the school.

The second play produced was Laurence Housman's "Brief Life," under the personal supervision of its author. Mr. Housman's daily presence among us was something to be grateful for, and his "Prunella" will remain more clearly in our minds since we heard him read a large portion of it aloud to illustrate his talk on "The making of a Play."

Other lectures included one on "Pageants," by Major Celey Trevelyan, a talk by Professor Morgan, of Hull University, on the importance of catholicity in the choice of plays, and several from Miss Kelly bearing on serious aspects of village production, which were instinct with wide personal experience.

The presence of Gordon Bottomley, President of the V.D.S., during the last day or two, and his kindly interest in our doings were warmly welcomed by us all.

After a fortnight of comradeship in work and play, we broke up with real regret, and a lively determination to do all we could to further the love of play-acting among the less sophisticated people of the country—whether they belong to town or country.

IDA GANDY

THE GWEN LALLY SUMMER SCHOOL OF DRAMA

Miss Lally held her summer school in Scarborough from September 3 to 15 and about forty students attended it, gathered from many parts of England.

The scheme of work consisted mainly of lectures in the morning, rehearsals in the afternoon, and varied entertainments provided by the school, or further rehearsing, in the evening.

After dinner on the day of assembly an audition was held for "The Merchant of Venice," when students were cast for their parts, after careful selection for voice and ability, and this was no simple task where there was so much talent and ambition in evidence.

The production of this play in its entirety was the first and absorbing object of the tuition in the school. A surprisingly convincing Shylock was found; Portia, who could give a rendering of the part with real charm and unaffected artistry, was also quickly recognized. Miss Lally's skill to create an Elizabethan atmosphere of gaiety and swing ensured that the play went "trippingly" and with speed and yet that none of the technicalities of by-play and business were overlooked. Apron stage and full stage were utilized with great advantage, so that there were no pauses between scenes and acts, and never a sound of the manual labour that was being performed behind the scenes by silent-footed assistants.

Miss Lally has the gift of inspiring others with some of her own keenness, so that the spirit of achievement was in the air and every one worked unsparingly for the cause. She had the able support of Mrs. Shaw, O.B.E., of Welburn, who lent her Art League of Service curtains of madonna blue to form the staging, and she also found an enthusiastic helper in Mrs. Bond as stage manager.

"ONE OF THE STUDENTS"

NOTTINGHAM PLAYGOERS CLUB

Over forty new members have applied for admission to this club this season, a very gratifying feature, which is due partly to the excellence of last season's fixtures, and to the very full programme provided for the coming season.

Miss Muriel Pratt opened the season with an address on Comedy, which sparkled with wit and caused a lively discussion. A play was afterwards read behind screens, in a "broadcast" manner. Two local playwrights, Arthur Statham and John Odams, gave an evening of their own works, and the Ibsen Centenary was marked by papers read by Mr. A. E. Beilby and Mr. Sydney Race.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

During December the club will receive a visit from the secretary of the Actors' Church Union, who will bring his travelling model theatre, a very perfect miniature, to illustrate his talk on the life of an actor on and off stage.

The fancy dress Ball which is such a brilliant spectacle annually is to be held in the Mikado on January 14th, and star artists from the theatre are expected to attend. On February 11th "L. du G." of "Punch" and "London Opinion," will talk on "Humour and the Stage," and two of his one-act comedies are to be performed. Mr. Nugent Monck will come from Norwich Madder-market Theatre on March 11th to tell us about his theatre there, and a discussion on "Is the Repertory Movement of Value?" is to follow his address.

Besides these evenings several MSS. or original plays are to be discussed or produced. As enquiries may be made for membership it should be stated that the secretary's address is at Moot Hall Chambers, Wheeler Gate, Nottingham; the subscription is only five shillings, and he is the undersigned.

NEVIL TRUMAN

BECKENHAM.

"Peer Gynt" in its entirety—no less, was the concerted goal of the two dramatic societies and the orchestral society of Beckenham! On November 3rd they brought it off—to a marvel. On a stage with an acting space of 22ft. by 15ft., and but one entrance—up four steep, narrow steps—for players, properties and scenery! Never can there have been a finer example of the fruits of spirited and faithful co-operation among amateurs. From the patron, Mr. David Greig, to the smallest Threadball, the dozens and dozens of players and helpers seem to have deserved the thanks for keenness and loyalty bestowed upon them, by way of epilogue, by the soul of the effort, Mr. Victor Thornton, who played Peer Gynt and produced. Obviously this was riding the Cendin-edge, and a cautious critic might mention several slips and stumbles in the production, though a steady head and a magnificent memory carried the hero-part through with scarcely a falter. But it would be an ill reward of Mr. Thornton's work to concentrate praise on his virtuosity. The wonder of the performance lay in the enterprise as a whole, and its success is fairly measured by its grip upon the audience. There was but little whispering through the music during the scene-intervals, which in itself showed how the orchestra played its part in the interpretation of the play. As the afternoon and evening wore on the audience became more and more intrigued and attentive; there was no reaching for hats and coats until the final curtain fell.

M. M.

FINSBURY.

A performance of "Pygmalion," by Bernard Shaw was given by the Finsbury and City Dramatic Club on Saturday, September 29, at the Cripplegate Theatre, in aid of the Benevolent and Orphan Fund of the National Union of Teachers. There was a large audience, who seemed thoroughly to enjoy the rich humour of the play, which was, on the whole, well acted.

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BANK OF ENGLAND O., D. AND O. SOCIETY.

On November 2nd and 3rd this society gave a performance of "The Best People" at the Kingsway Hall, Covent Garden. Significantly enough, the name of the producer—a much experienced professional—appeared on the programme in large heavy capitals; those of the players in small light capitals. The two authors were accorded large light capitals, which was ample recognition of their services for their obvious divergence of intention as to the style of the "comedy" has made it a hotch-potch of naturalistic comedy, farce and sentimental romance. However, the piece bears the hall-mark of West-end production, and Mr. Rupert M. Heath succeeded to admiration in helping a company of amateurs to achieve imitations of professionals that surprised and gratified not only themselves but their unsophisticated friends and fellow-workers in the Bank of England. The acme of astonished delight was experienced by Eileen Hogan in the flashy stock part of an American chorus-girl prostitute—*de-ex-machina*. Several of the cast showed themselves capable of doing interesting work, if they would pluck up courage to tackle interesting plays to which both they and the producer could bring the freshness of original study. On this occasion the honours went to Laurence J. Attridge, Phyllis Youngman and Ivan Estridge, who did very well in those passages of the play that bore thoughtful consideration, and gave a chance to sincere feeling and real humour.

M. M.

HAMPSTEAD GARDEN SUBURB

With commendable enterprise the Play and Pageant Union chose "The Good-Natured Man" in preference to "She Stoops to Conquer," to celebrate the bi-centenary of Oliver Goldsmith's birth. It was well that some company should try what they could make of a piece with an involved and badly-handled plot, artificial characters, and wit and humour that, for the most part, are as "period" as the costume and the language. There are, indeed, a few rich laughs in the dialogue, but too few to justify the hope that the comedy would prove worthy of frequent revival. Certainly not by amateurs. This point was proved to the hilt by Miss Richland Jean Manson, who is a professional, though a very young one. Alone among the cast she seemed to perceive the rhythmic value of eighteenth-century comedy, and could deliver her long sentences with ease, clean-cut yet natural enunciation and sparkling point. With an admirable stage-presence, grace, intellect and sincerity, Jean Manson is an actress whose discovery sheds lustre on the very distinguished community group among whom she has found her métier.

M. M.

THE GUILDFOUSE PLAYERS.

"The Likes of Her," a comedy by Charles McEvoy, although the action of the play takes place immediately after the war, proved very much alive in interest as acted by the Guildhouse Players, on November 15, at the Guildhouse, Eccleson Square, London. Bridewell Court, Stepney, on a Sabbath morning, with the washing of the week before still drying, was an excellent stage set. The play was admirably produced by Miss V. Stannard.

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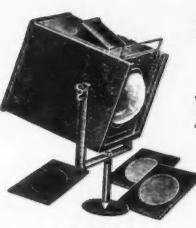
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